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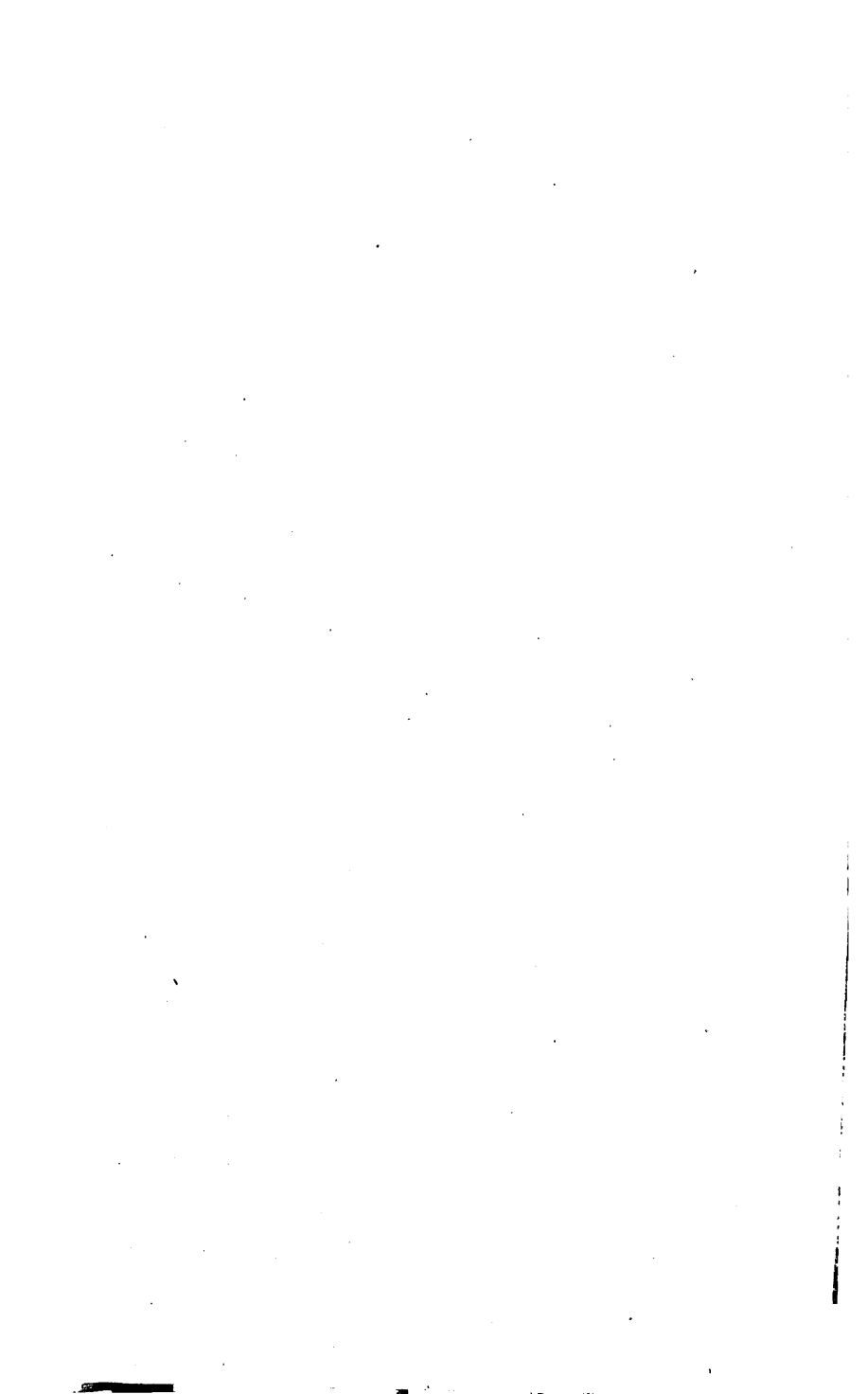
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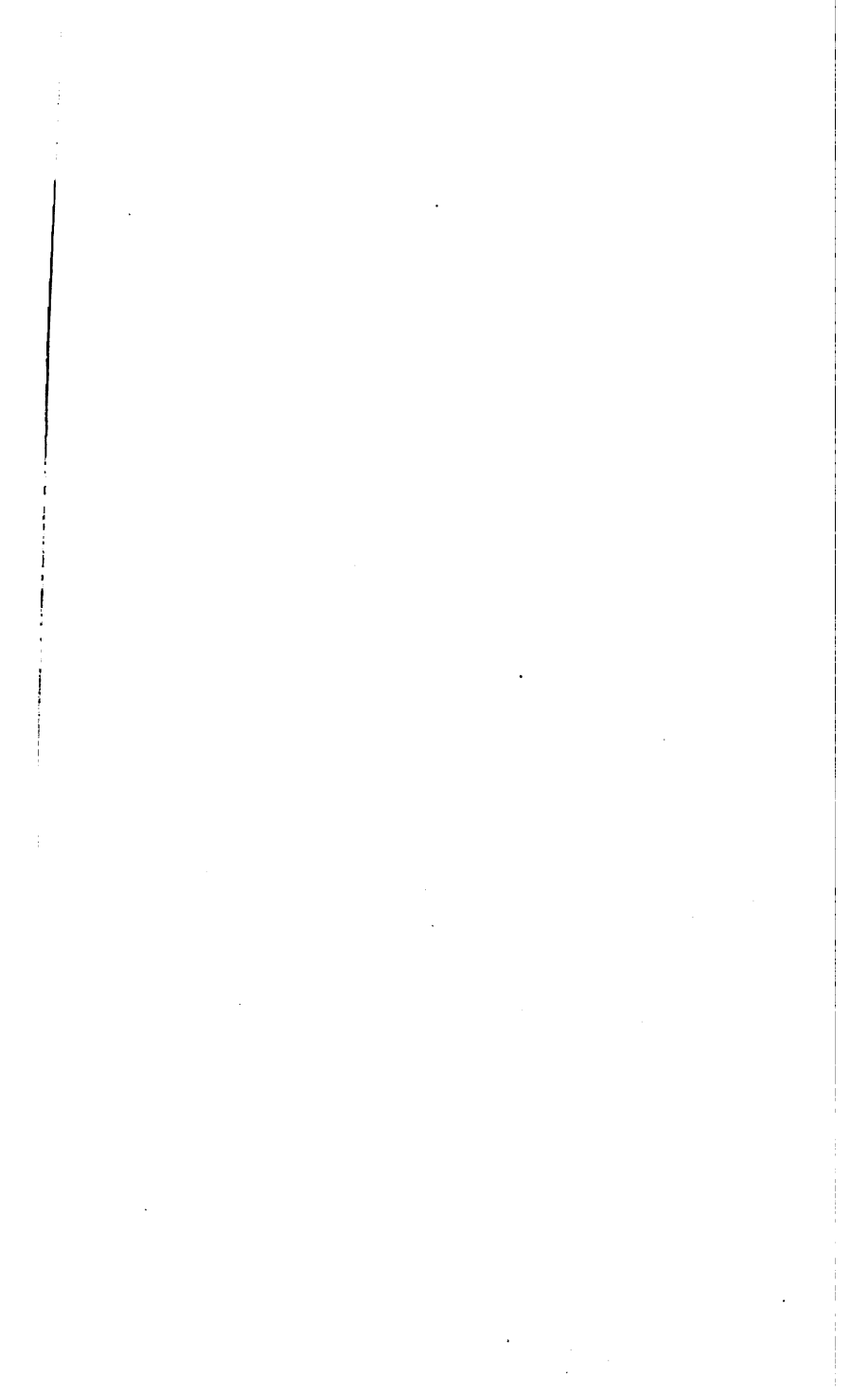


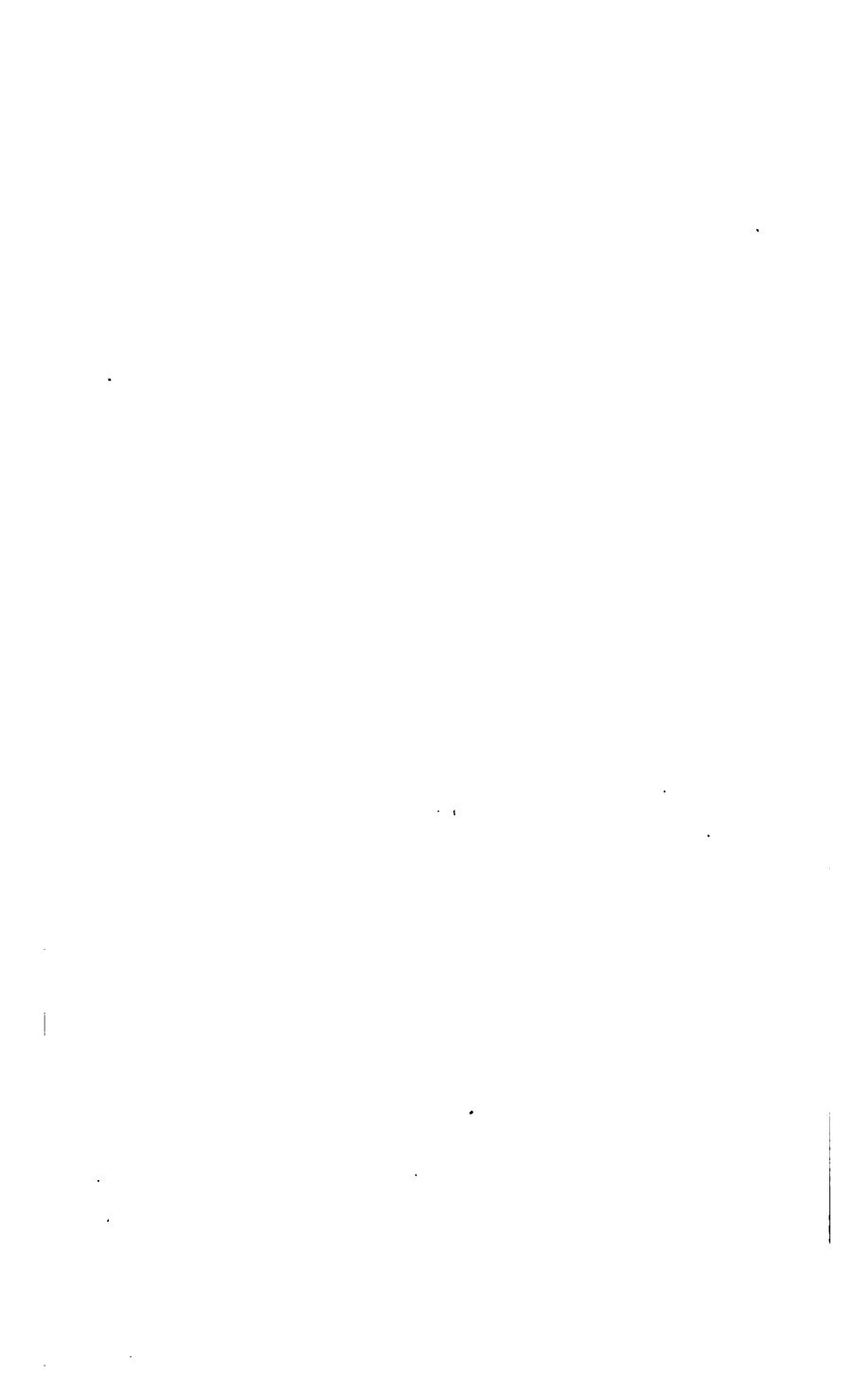
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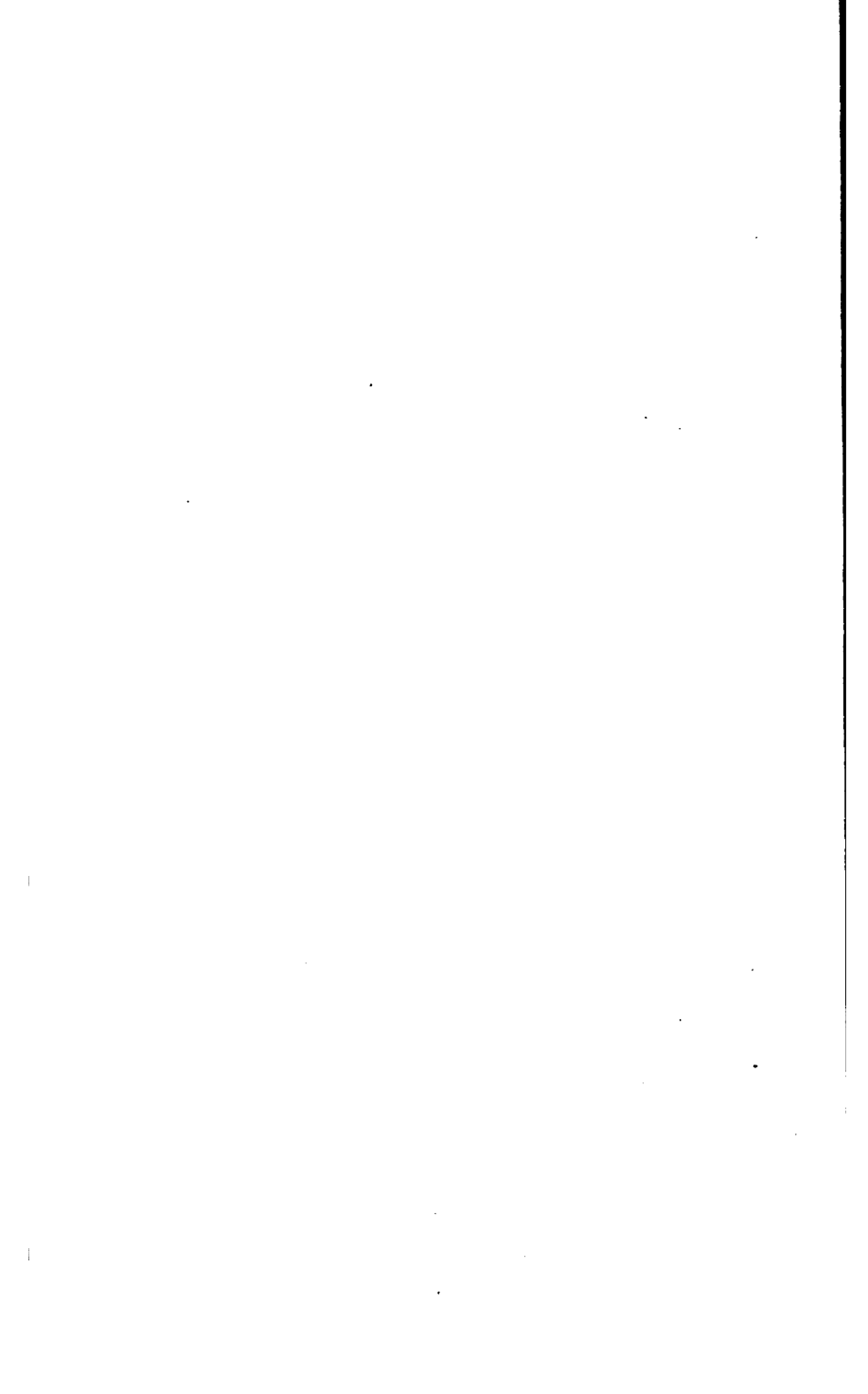
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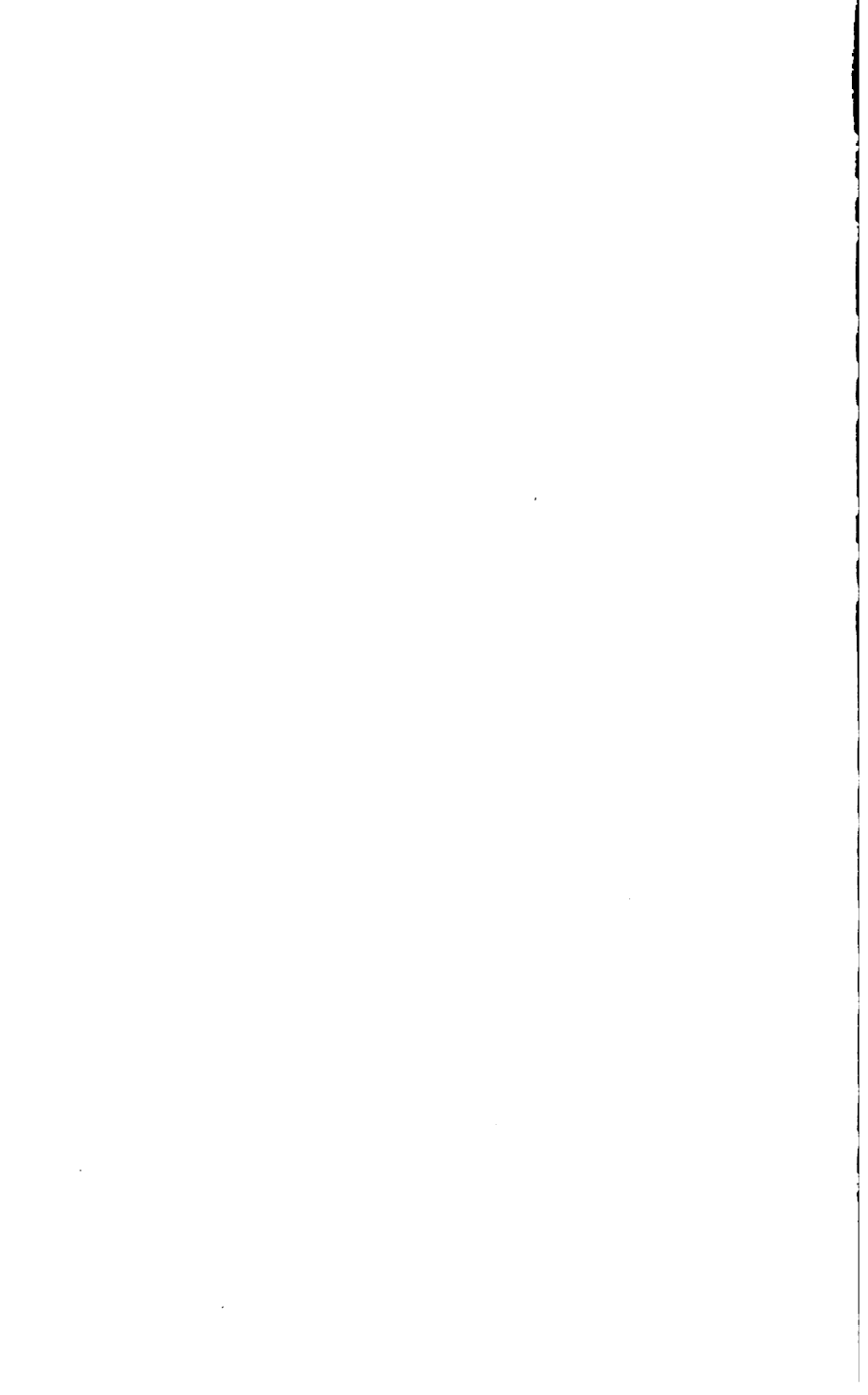
A SONG OF SPEED

W. E. HENLEY

LONDON: DAVID NUTT



A Song of Speed



A SONG OF SPEED

BY

WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY

11

LONDON

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AT THE SIGN OF THE PHŒNIX

LONG ACRE

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To ALFRED HARMSWORTH

M286587

*Now there is nothing gives a man such spirit,
Leavening his blood as cayenne doth a curry,
As going at full speed. . . .*

*What a delightful thing's a turn-pike road!
So smooth, so level, such a means of shav'ing
The Earth as scarce the Eagle in the broad
Air can accomplish. . . .*

BYRON.

A SONG OF SPEED

*In the Eye of the Lord,
By the Will of the Lord,
Out of the infinite
Bounty dissembled,
Since Time began,
In the Hand of the Lord,
Speed !*

Speed as a chattel :
Speed in your daily
Account and economy ;
One with your wines,
And your books, and your bath—
Speed !

Speed as a rapture :
An integral element
In the new scheme of Life
Which the good Lord, the Master,
Wills well you should frame
In the light of His laugh
And His great, His ungrudging,
His reasoned benevolence—

Speed !

Speed, and the range of God's skies,
Distances, changes, surprises ;
Speed, and the hug of God's winds
And the play of God's airs,
Beautiful, whimsical, wonderful ;
Clean, fierce and clean,
With a thrust in the throat
And a rush at the nostrils ;
Keen, with a far-away

A SONG OF SPEED

11

Taste of inhuman
Unviolable Vasts,
Where the Stars of the Morning
Go singing together
For joy in the dazzling,
Naked, unvisited
Emperies of Space !
And the heart in your breast
Sings, as the World
Slips past like a dream
Of Speed—
Speed on the Knees of the Lord.

Speed—
Speed, and a world of new havings :
Red-rushing splendours
Of Dawn ; the disturbing,
Long-drawn, tumultuous

Passions of Sunset ;
And, these twain between,
The desperate, great anarchies,
The matchless serenitudes,
The magical, ravishing,
Changing, transforming
Trances of Daylight.
Speed, and the lap
Of the Land that you know
For the first time (it seems),
As you push through the maze
Of her beauties and privacies,
Terrors, astonishments :
Heath, common, pinewood,
Downland and river-scape,
Cherry-orchards, water-meads,
Forests and stubbles,
Oak-temples, daisy-spreads,

Vistas of harebell,
Hills of the ruggedest,
Vales of the comeliest ;
Barrows and cromlechs,
Ancestral ossuaries,
Whence (you may fancy)
The troubled grey ghosts
Of your forefathers peer,
As you swoop down on them,
With a wild, wondering
Pride in their seed ;
Placid and sylvan,
Stray churchyards that, falling
Into the village-streets,
Keep the poor living
Still in a reverent
And kindly communion
With their familiar

A SONG OF SPEED

And passioning dead ;
Brooks with fat, comforting,
Sociable salallows
Fenced, and still, sleepy-faced
Lengths of Canal,
Where the one thing alive
Is the horse on the tow-path,
Tugging in dreams
At the long barge that hangs
Like a dream on his collar ;
Secular avenues,
Noble alignments
Of Elms, since a century
Hailing the Dawns
And exalting the Sunsets ;
Beech-woods that burn out
The life in their leafage,
And figure the death

Of the Year in a glory
Of colour and fire ;
Roads, where the stalwart
Soldier of Cæsar
Put by his bread
And his garlic, and, girding
His conquering sword
To his unconquered thigh,
Lay down in his armour,
And went to his Gods
By the way that he 'd made.
Then the miraculous
Pageant that shows
How this Earth of our loves
And our dreams and our dead
Presses unwitting
Back to the sunless,
Unsouled, disfeatured

Filth of the Prime :
Brilliant, enchanting
Visions of Summer,
Somnolent, stately,
Gravid and satisfied ;
And Autumn, his hands
Full of apples ; and Winter,
The old Tyrant we love
For the sake of his kinswoman,
Spring with her violets,
Spring with her lambs,
Spring with her old,
Irresistible mandate,
The joyous, the reckless
Compeller of Wombs,
Spring ! And with these
Smoke, Rain, and Mist
In their subtle, fantastical

Moodiness ; Gardens
And Woods in their pleasure,
Their pride of increase,
And their helpless and sorrowful
Pomp of decay !
Last, the grey Sea,
The Antient of Days,
With his secret as new
After thousands of years
As it was to the old,
The alert, aboriginal
Father of Ships ;
And Speed !
Speed you conjure
With a crook of your finger ;
Speed which your touch
On a core, on a master-bit,
Breeds for your use ;

As Man's hand on a tiller
Gives brain to a boat ;
As Man's hand on a pen
Turns the poor, workaday
Labourers of language
Straight into insolent,
High, living Song ;
Speed—
Speed in the Lap of the Lord !

Trim, naked Speed !
Speed, and a victory
Snatched in the teeth
Of the Masters of Darkness.
For the antient, invincible
Spirit of Man,
Stern-set, adventurous,
Dreaming things, doing things ;

Strong with a strength
Won from tremendous
And desperate vicissitudes,
Out of unnumbered,
Unstoried experiences ;
Fighting the one fight,
The last and the best fight,
Hard, and by inchmeal
Winning it steadily,
Corner by corner,
Here a snatch, there a bit,
Over the black, irresistible
Legions of Death,
The impassive, unfaltering
Captains and Companies
Of the primordial
Powers of the Princedoms
And Thrones of the Grave ;

A SONG OF SPEED

Strongly and sternly
Asserts and approves itself,
Mightily turns
To its task of attesting
Its right to a figment,
A shadow of Deity,
Full in the Face of the Lord.

For the Heart of Man
Tears at Man's destiny
Ever ; and ever
Makes what it may
Of his wretched occasions,
His infinitesimal
Portion in Time,
His merely incomputable
Shred of Eternity,
His ninety-ninth part,

If you count by God's clock,
Of a second on Earth
In the lust and the pride
Of God's garment, the Flesh.
So Woman and War,
And the Child (the unspeakable
Promise and proof
Of a right immortality),
Learning and Drink,
And Money and Song,
Ships, Folios, and Horses,
The craft of the Healer,
The worship of God
And things done to the instant
Delight of the Devil,
And all, all that tends
To his hard-to-come, swift-to-go
Glory, are tested,

Gutted, exhausted,
Chucked down the draught ;
And the quest, the pursuit,
The attack and the conquest,
Of the Unknown goes on—
Goes on in the Joy of the Lord.

For, beaten in Time
From the start to the finish,
So utterly beaten
Appeal is impossible,
The Spirit of Man,
Enquiring, aspiring ;
Passionately scaling
Ice-bitten altitudes,
Neighbourhood of none
Save the austere,
Unapproachable Stars ;

Scapes from its destiny,
Holds on its course
Of attent and discovery,
So as to leave,
When the Lord takes it back to
Him,
The lot of the World
Something the prouder,
Something the loftier,
Something the braver,
For that it hath done :
Something the good man,
The wise man, the strong man,
Poet or Soldier,
Maker of Empires
Or Broker of Diamonds,
Preacher or Surgeon,
Or the Inventor :

A SONG OF SPEED

Artist in elements,
Expert in substances,
Strengths, frangibilities,
Points of combustion,
Points of resistance :
These, and an hundred,
A thousand besides
Of the right, the authentic
Talon and pinion,
Snapping up in a flash
After years of endeavour
One of God's messages,
Do to Man's solacing,
Pride, and magnificence,
Under the Feet of the Lord.

Hence the Mercedes !
Look at her. Shapeless ?

Unhandsome? Unpaintable?
Yes ; but the strength
Of some seventy-five horses :
Seventy-five puissant,
Superb fellow-creatures :
Is summed and contained
In her pipes and her cylinders.
Mind after mind,
On fire with discovery,
Filled full with the fruits
Of an hundred fat years,
And mad with the dreams
And desires of To-Day
Have toiled themselves dull
To achieve her components.
She can stop in a foot's length ;
She steers as it were
With a hair you might pluck

From your Mistress's nape ;
She crawls, if you please
So to lightly her virtue,
At your Mistress's pace
When she goes for a stroll,
Which is partly on Earth
And partly, She dreaming
Of You, in broad Heaven.
Yet ask but a sign,
But a proof of her quality,
Handle her valves,
Her essentials, her secrets,
And she runs down the birds
(You can catch them like flies
As, poor wretches, they race from
you !) ;
Ay, and becomes,
As the Spirit and Mind

A SONG OF SPEED

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Of God's nearest approach
To Himself hath so willed it,
The Angel of Speed—
Speed in the Laugh of the Lord.

There be good things,
Good things innumerable,
Held like an alms
In the clutch of the Master ;
And at times, when He feels
That His creatures are doing
Their best to assert
Their part in His dream,
He loosens His fist
And a miracle slips from it
Into the hands
Of His adepts and servants.
Thus, in late years,

Smiling as *WHISTLER*,
Smiling as *KELVIN*,
And *RODIN* and *TOLSTOI*,
And *LISTER* and *STRAUSS*
(That with his microbes,
This with his fiddles !),
Tugged at His fingers
And worked out His meanings,
Thus hath He slackened
His grasp, and this Thing,
This marvellous *Mercédes*,
This triumphing contrivance,
Comes to make other
Man's life than she found it :
The Earth for her tyres
As the Sea for his keels ;
Alike in the old lands,
Enseamed with the wheel-ways

Of thousands of dusty
And dim generations,
And in the new countries,
Whose Winds blow unbreathed,
And their Lights are first-hand
From our Father, the Sun.
Thus the Mercédes
Comes, O, she comes,
This astonishing device,
This amazing Mercédes,
With Speed—
Speed in the Fear of the Lord.

*So in the Eye of the Lord,
Under the Feet of the Lord,
Out of the measureless
Goodness and grace
In the Hand of the Lord.*

Speed !

Speed on the Knees,

Speed in the Laugh,

Speed by the Gift,

Speed in the Trust of the Lord—

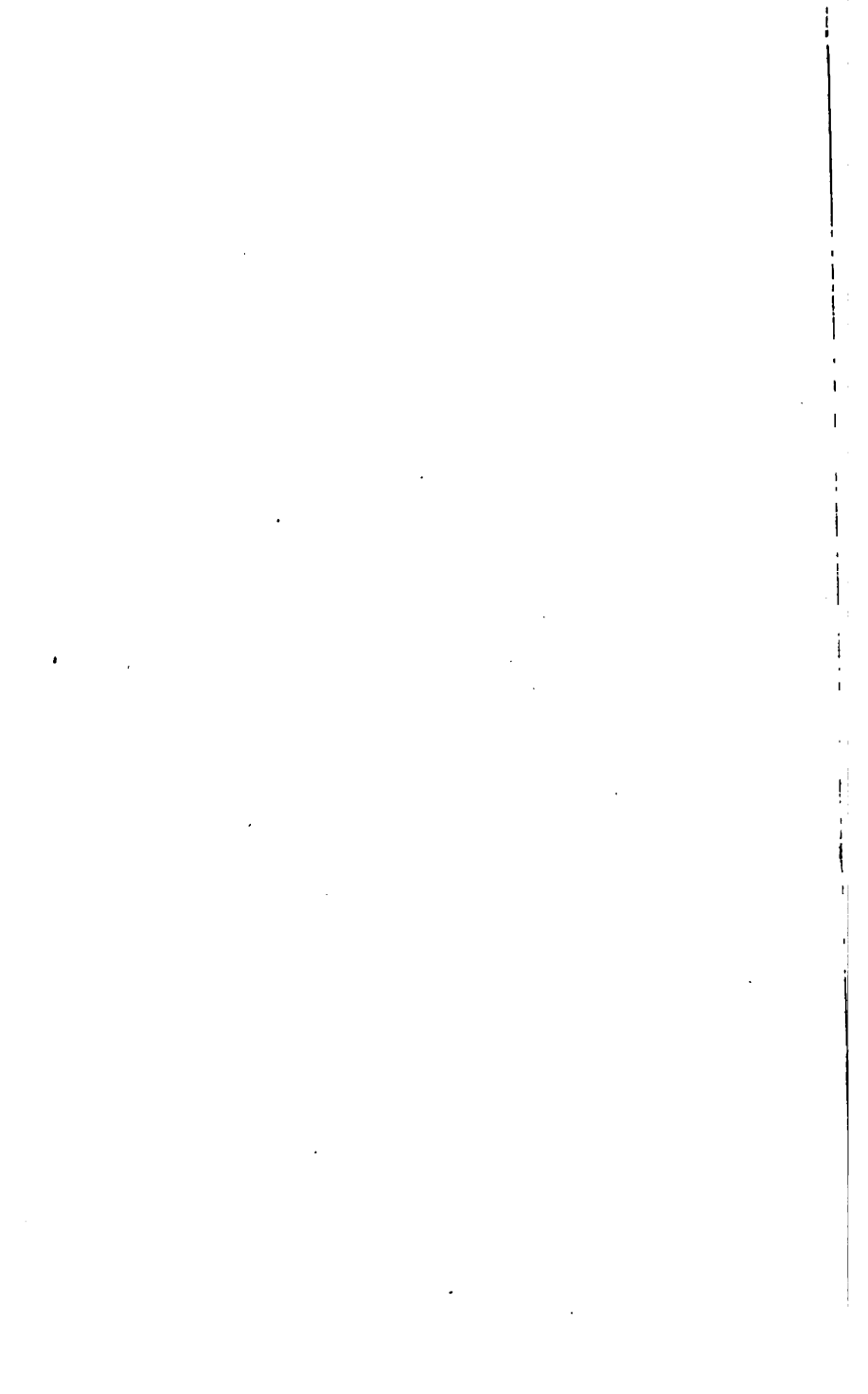
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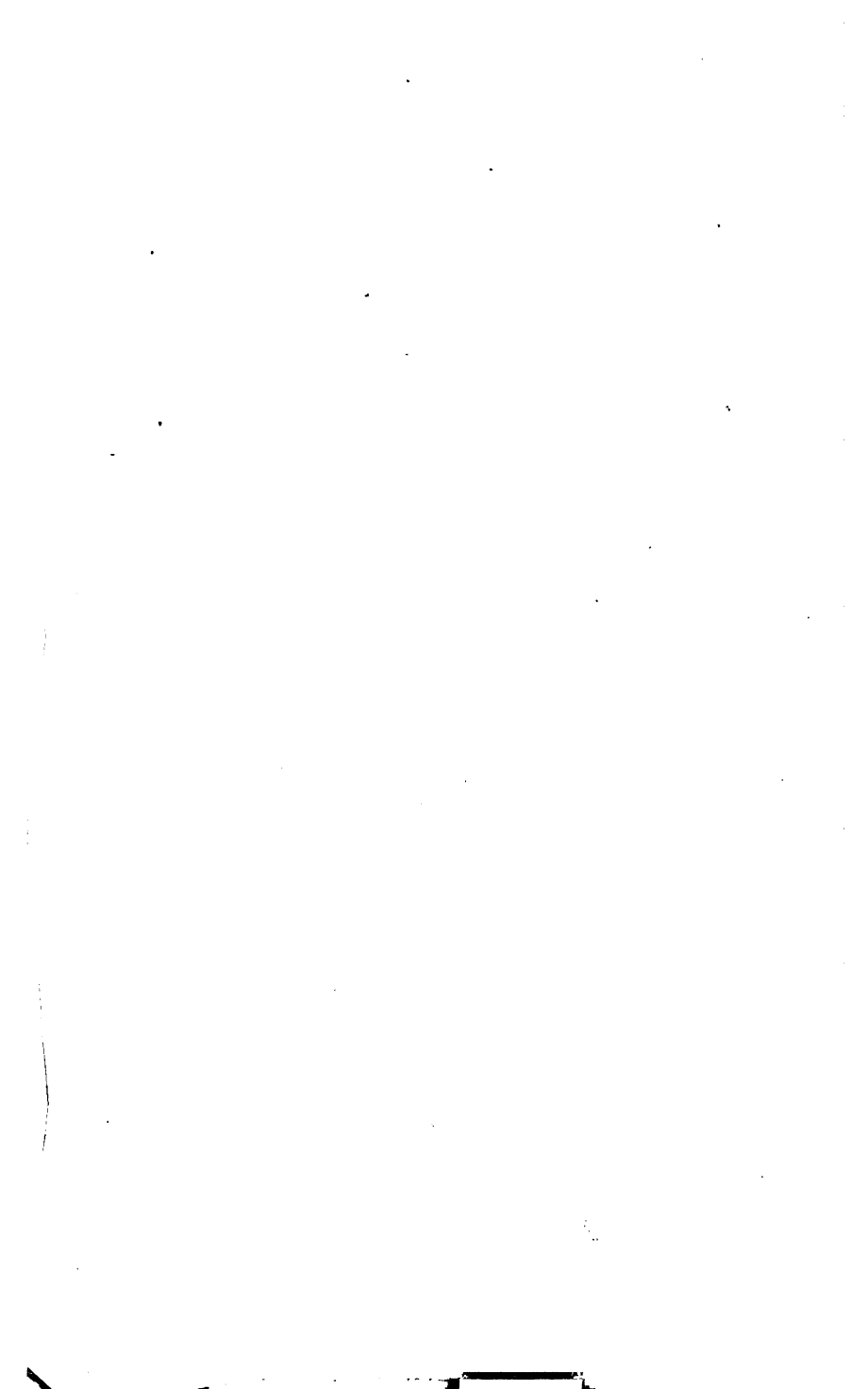
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